

CONTACT:

Keith Kelly, Administrator
Unemployment Insurance Division
406-444-2749
kkelly@state.mt.us

Marty Lambert
Gallatin County Attorney
406-582-2145

BELGRADE MAN CONVICTED OF UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE FRAUD

April 9, 2004 – Helena – Thomas Richards of Belgrade, Montana, was found guilty in District Court of unemployment insurance fraud on Tuesday, April 6, 2004.

Richards was working part-time, and while eligible for partial unemployment benefits, neglected to report his part-time employment and continued to collect full benefits. Richards' employer protested the charges to their account, and requested an investigation by the Department of Labor and Industry's investigation unit in the Unemployment Insurance Division. Investigators confirmed Richards was collecting unemployment benefits beyond the amount he was eligible to receive, and provided several opportunities for Richard to repay the overpayment. Richards did not repay the money, so the Department of Labor and Industry turned the matter over to the Gallatin County Attorney's office charging felony theft, common scheme.

"We are serious about prosecuting individuals who fraudulently abuse the unemployment insurance system," said Keith Kelly, administrator of the Unemployment Insurance Division. "Montana employers fund this program to help individuals who are separated from their jobs return to work as quickly as possible, and abuses of the program cannot be tolerated," he continued.

Gallatin County Attorney Marty Lambert said, **"Our office takes these situations very seriously, and we will work with the State to put an end to this practice in our county."**

Richards was found guilty of defrauding the unemployment insurance program of \$1,523, and faces sentencing in June. Richards' sentence will likely include repayment of this amount, and may include a penalty up to 33%.

Deputy Gallatin County Attorney Elizabeth Ridenour prosecuted the case.